

## Sexually Active Teens

### Headline

Among non-Hispanic black students, the percentage of sexually active students decreased from 59 percent in 1991 to a low of 46 percent in 2007. ([Table 1](#))

### Importance

Sexually active teenagers are at an immediate risk of becoming pregnant and/or of acquiring a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Young sexually active teens are much less likely than older teens to use contraception consistently; however, the vast majority of teen births are unintended.<sup>1</sup> Data from 2002 indicates that approximately 88 percent of pregnancies to women ages 15 to 19 were unintended.<sup>2</sup> Teen pregnancy rates, birth rates, and rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the U.S. are among the highest in the industrialized world.<sup>3</sup>

The best way to prevent unplanned pregnancies and STIs is abstinence (either never having sex or discontinuing sexual activity).<sup>4</sup> Adolescents who delay their first sexual experience are less likely to regret the timing of their first experience, have fewer sexual partners, and are less likely to be involved in unhealthy sexual relationships.<sup>5</sup> However, among sexually active teenagers, *consistent* and *effective* contraceptive use is necessary to avoid unwanted pregnancies and STIs.

### Trends

The percentage of high school students who are sexually active (had sexual intercourse in the past three months) fluctuated only slightly since 1991, ranging from 33 percent to 38 percent. In 2007, 35 percent of high school students reported being sexually active. Among non-Hispanic black students, however, the percentage of sexually active students decreased from 59 percent in 1991 to a low of 46 percent in 2007.<sup>6</sup> ([Table 1](#))

### Differences by Gender

Roughly a third of both male and female high school students reported being sexually active in 2007 (34 percent and 36 percent, respectively). In 2007, white non-Hispanic males were slightly less likely than white non-Hispanic female students to be sexually active, (31 percent versus 35 percent, respectively). There was no statistically significant difference in sexual activity between black non-Hispanic and Hispanic males and their female peers (49 and 40 percent versus 44 and 35 percent, respectively). ([Figure 2](#))

### Differences by Race and Ethnicity<sup>5</sup>

Non-Hispanic black high school students are more likely than Hispanic and non-Hispanic white students to be sexually active (46 percent compared with 37 percent and 33 percent, respectively, in 2007). ([Figure 2](#)) The pattern holds among both male and female students. This gap, however, has decreased since 1991, when non-Hispanic black

students were nearly twice as likely as other students to report being sexual active. ([Table 1](#))

### **Differences by Grade**

The likelihood of being sexually active increases with age by approximately 11 percentage points each year: In 2007, 20 percent of ninth grade students were sexually active, compared with 53 percent of twelfth graders. While ninth grade males are slightly more likely than their female peers to be currently sexually active, (22 percent versus 18 percent, respectively) this trend reverses by the twelfth grade, where 57 percent of females report being currently sexually active, as compared with 48 percent of twelfth grade males. ([Figure 1](#))

### **State and Local Estimates**

2007 estimates of sexual activity among high school students (Grades 9-12) are available for selected states and cities by gender from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbss/>

### **International Estimates**

International estimates can be found from UNICEF's research center at: <http://www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/index.html>

### **National Goals**

Although *Healthy People 2010* does not address sexually active teenagers specifically, numerous goals are set that would indirectly lower the percent of teens who are sexually active, including the goal of reducing the percentage of teenagers who are sexually experienced before age 15, as well as the percentage of teenagers aged 15 to 17 who have ever had sexual intercourse.<sup>7</sup>

More information is available at:

<http://www.healthypeople.gov/document/HTML/tracking/OD09.htm>, (See goals 9-8 and 9-9)

### **Definition**

Students who are sexually active are those students who reported having had sexual intercourse in the three months preceding the survey. Thus, it is possible for a student to have had sexual intercourse but not be sexually active.

### **Data Source**

Data for 1991: YRBSS: Youth Online, Comprehensive Results. Retrieved May 24, 2004 from URL: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbss/>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Surveillance Summaries*:  
Data for 1993: March 24, 1995. MMWR 1995; 44 (No. SS-1): Table 20.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00036855.htm#00001034.htm>  
Data for 1995: September 27, 1996. MMWR 1996; 45 (No. SS-4): Table 26.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00043812.htm#00001944.htm>  
Data for 1997: August 14, 1998. MMWR 1998; 47(No. SS-3): Table 26.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00054432.htm#00003367.htm>  
Data for 1999: June 9, 2000. MMWR 2000; 49(No. SS-5): Table 30.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss4905a1.htm#tab30>  
Data for 2001: June 28, 2002. MMWR 2002; 51(No. SS-4): Table 30  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5104a1.htm#tab30>  
Data for 2003: May 21, 2004. MMWR 2004; 53(No. SS-2): Table 44.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5302a1.htm#tab44>  
Data for 2005: June 9, 2006. MMWR 2006; 55 (No. SS-5): Table 46.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5505a1.htm#tab46>  
Data for 2007: June 6, 2008. MMWR 2007:57(No. SS-4) Table 63.  
[www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pfd/ss/ss5704.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pfd/ss/ss5704.pdf)

## Raw Data Source

Youth Risk Behavior Survey

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/index.htm>

## Approximate Date of Next Update

Summer 2010

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<sup>1</sup> Chandra A, Martinez GM, Mosher WD, Abma JC, Jones J. Fertility, family planning, and reproductive health of U.S. women: data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. *Vital Health Statistics* 2005; 23 (25). [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr\\_23/sr23\\_025.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_025.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Terry-Humen, E., Manlove, J., and Cottingham, S. (2006). Trends and Recent Estimates: Sexual Activity Among US Teens. Child Trends Research Brief. <http://www.childtrends.org/files/SexualActivityRB.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> American Social Health Association. "Learn About STDs/STIs."

[http://www.ashastd.org/learn/learn\\_prevention.cfm](http://www.ashastd.org/learn/learn_prevention.cfm). Accessed May 2, 2008.

American Pregnancy Association. (2003). "Abstinence."

<http://www.americanpregnancy.org/preventingpregnancy/abstinence.html>

<sup>5</sup> Chandra A, Martinez GM, Mosher WD, Abma JC, Jones J. Fertility, family planning, and reproductive health of U.S. women: data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. *Vital Health Statistics* 2005; 23 (25). [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr\\_23/sr23\\_025.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_23/sr23_025.pdf)

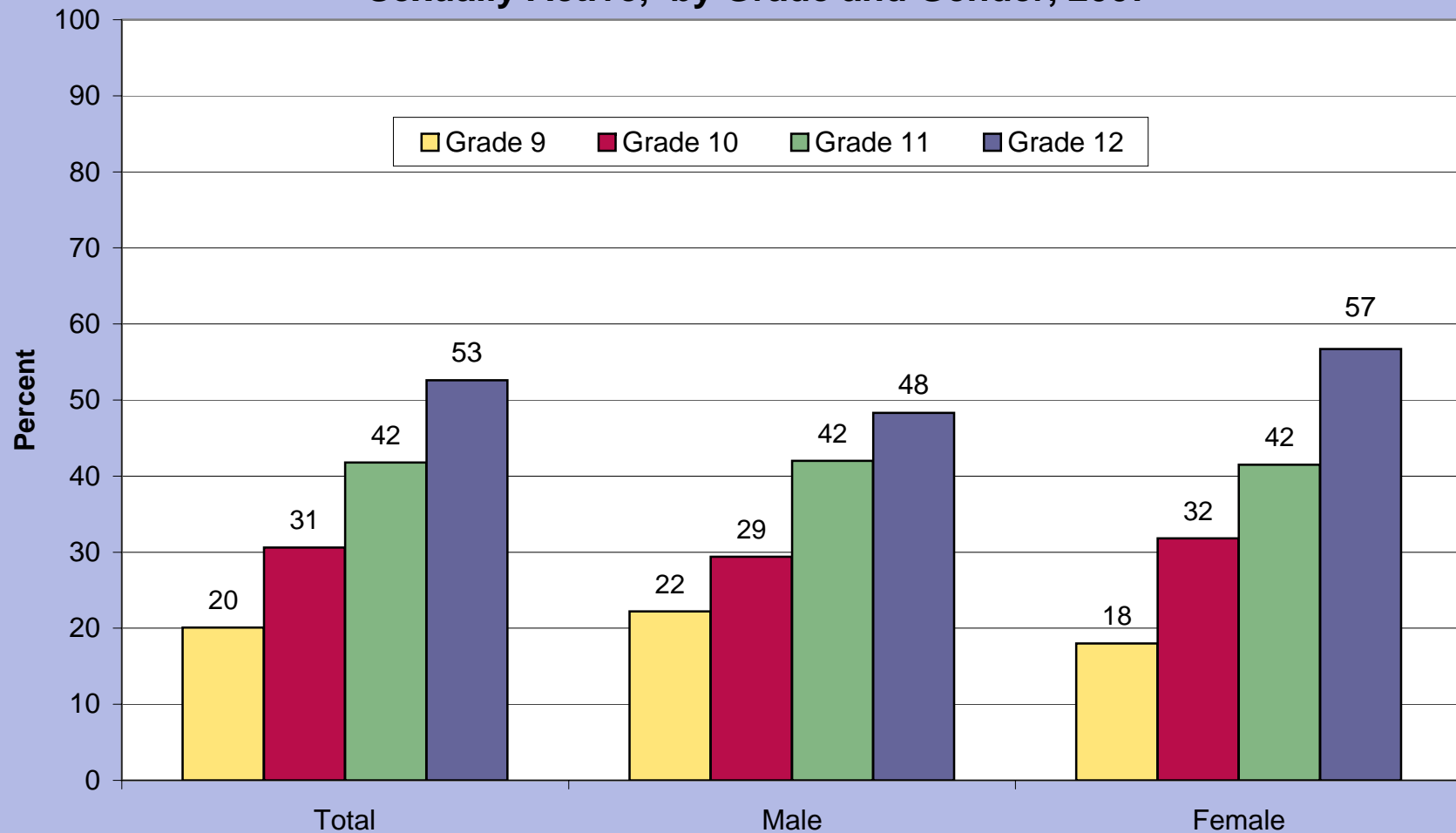
<sup>6</sup> Race/ethnicity estimates from 1999 and later are not directly comparable to earlier years due to federal changes in race definitions. In surveys conducted in 1999 and later, respondents were allowed to select more than one race when selecting their racial category. Estimates presented here only include respondents who selected one category when choosing their race.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010. 2nd ed. With Understanding and Improving Health and Objectives for Improving Health*. 2 vols. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000.

<http://www.healthypeople.gov/document/HTML/tracking/OD09.htm> (Goals 9-8 & 9-9).

Figure 1

## Percentage of Students in Grades 9 through 12 who Report they are Sexually Active,<sup>1</sup> by Grade and Gender, 2007

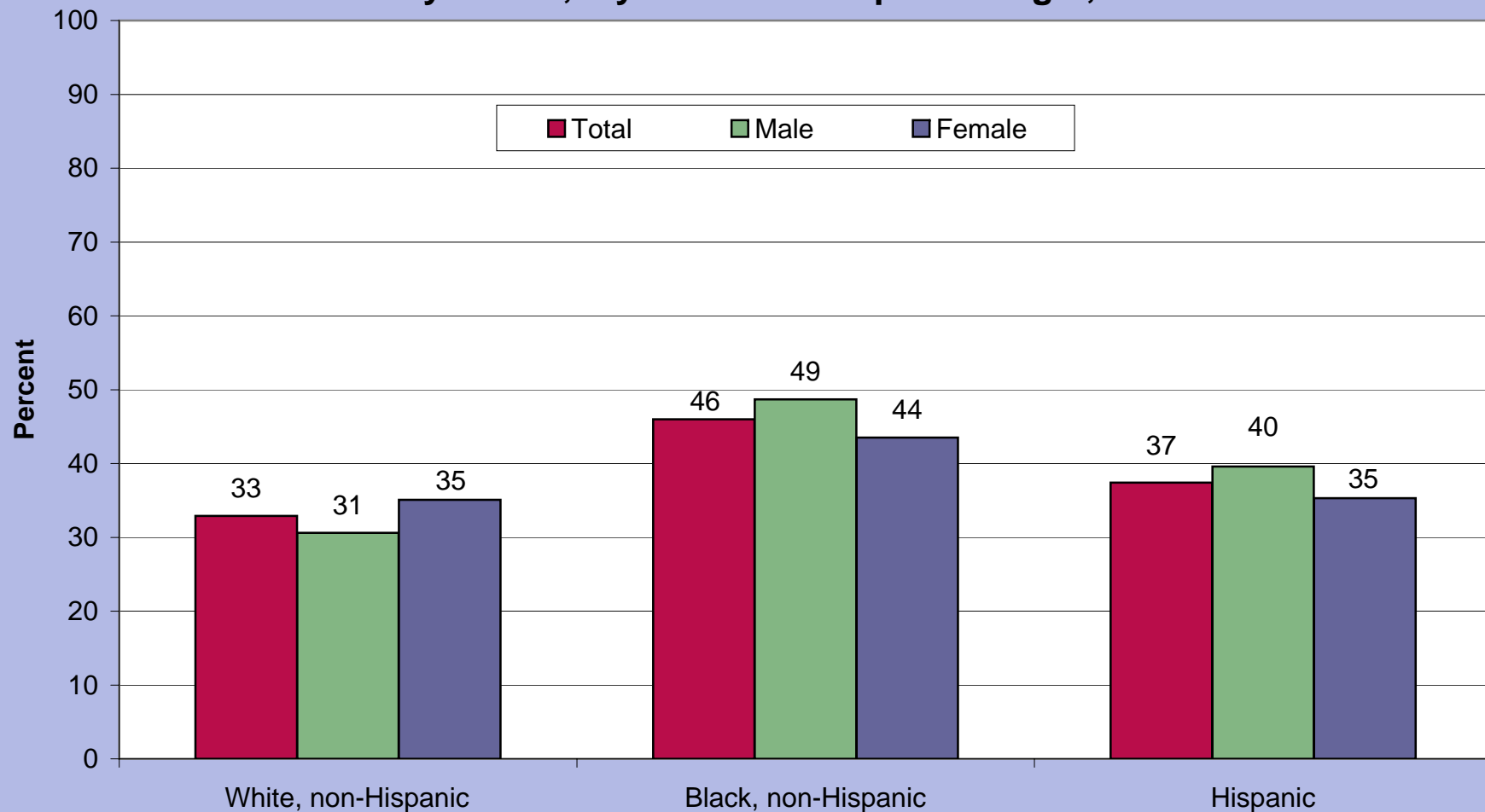


<sup>1</sup>Sexually active is defined as having had sexual intercourse within the past 3 months.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Surveillance Summaries*, June 6, 2008. MMWR 2007:57(No. SS-4) Table 63.

Figure 2

## Percentage of Students in Grades 9 through 12 who Report they are Sexually Active,<sup>1</sup> by Race and Hispanic Origin,<sup>2</sup> 2007



<sup>1</sup>Sexually active is defined as having had sexual intercourse within the past 3 months.

<sup>2</sup> Estimates reported here only include respondents who selected one race category.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Surveillance Summaries*, June 6, 2008. MMWR 2007:57(No. SS-4) Table 63.

Table 1

**Sexually Active Teens:<sup>1</sup> Students in Grades 9-12 Who Have Had Intercourse Within the Last Three Months, Selected Years, 1991-2007**

|                                   | 1991 | 1993 | 1995 | 1997 | 1999 | 2001 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>All Students</b>               | 37.5 | 37.6 | 37.9 | 34.8 | 36.3 | 33.4 | 34.3 | 33.9 | 35.0 |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>2</sup></b> |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>White, non-Hispanic</b>        | 33.9 | 34.0 | 34.8 | 32.0 | 33.0 | 31.3 | 30.8 | 32.0 | 32.9 |
| <b>Black, non-Hispanic</b>        | 59.3 | 59.1 | 54.2 | 53.6 | 53.0 | 45.6 | 49.0 | 47.4 | 46.0 |
| <b>Hispanic</b>                   | 37.0 | 39.4 | 39.3 | 35.4 | 36.3 | 35.9 | 37.1 | 35.0 | 37.4 |
| <b>Grade</b>                      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>9</b>                          | 22.4 | 24.8 | 23.6 | 24.2 | 26.6 | 22.7 | 21.2 | 21.9 | 20.1 |
| <b>10</b>                         | 33.2 | 30.1 | 33.7 | 29.2 | 33.0 | 29.7 | 30.6 | 29.2 | 30.6 |
| <b>11</b>                         | 43.3 | 40.0 | 42.4 | 37.8 | 37.5 | 38.1 | 41.1 | 39.4 | 41.8 |
| <b>12</b>                         | 50.6 | 53.0 | 49.7 | 46.0 | 50.6 | 47.9 | 48.9 | 49.4 | 52.6 |
| <b>Male</b>                       | 36.8 | 37.5 | 35.5 | 33.4 | 36.2 | 33.4 | 33.8 | 33.3 | 34.3 |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>2</sup></b> |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>White, non-Hispanic</b>        | 32.2 | 32.9 | 31.6 | 29.6 | 31.3 | 30.0 | 28.5 | 30.6 | 30.6 |
| <b>Black, non-Hispanic</b>        | 64.1 | 65.1 | 58.3 | 60.5 | 55.8 | 52.3 | 54.0 | 47.4 | 48.7 |
| <b>Hispanic</b>                   | 41.8 | 40.7 | 39.2 | 37.3 | 38.5 | 37.3 | 38.5 | 35.0 | 39.6 |
| <b>Grade</b>                      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>9</b>                          | 24.3 | 26.8 | 24.2 | 25.9 | 29.1 | 25.9 | 24.0 | 24.5 | 22.2 |
| <b>10</b>                         | 31.2 | 29.6 | 32.1 | 27.6 | 33.9 | 28.6 | 30.0 | 27.2 | 29.4 |
| <b>11</b>                         | 41.9 | 39.1 | 36.8 | 34.8 | 35.4 | 37.8 | 39.2 | 37.9 | 42.0 |
| <b>12</b>                         | 49.2 | 52.7 | 47.9 | 43.1 | 48.1 | 44.6 | 46.5 | 47.0 | 48.3 |
| <b>Female</b>                     | 38.2 | 37.5 | 40.4 | 36.5 | 36.3 | 33.4 | 34.6 | 34.6 | 35.6 |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>2</sup></b> |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>White, non-Hispanic</b>        | 35.9 | 35.2 | 38.5 | 35.1 | 34.7 | 32.3 | 33.1 | 33.5 | 35.1 |
| <b>Black, non-Hispanic</b>        | 55.3 | 53.2 | 50.6 | 47.3 | 50.3 | 39.5 | 44.2 | 43.8 | 43.5 |
| <b>Hispanic</b>                   | 32.8 | 37.9 | 39.4 | 33.2 | 34.0 | 34.5 | 35.8 | 33.7 | 35.3 |
| <b>Grade</b>                      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| <b>9</b>                          | 20.4 | 22.5 | 22.3 | 22.4 | 24.0 | 19.9 | 18.3 | 19.5 | 18.0 |
| <b>10</b>                         | 35.3 | 30.7 | 35.4 | 31.2 | 32.0 | 30.7 | 31.2 | 31.1 | 31.8 |
| <b>11</b>                         | 44.7 | 40.9 | 48.1 | 41.5 | 39.5 | 38.1 | 42.9 | 40.8 | 41.5 |
| <b>12</b>                         | 52.1 | 53.2 | 51.9 | 49.5 | 53.0 | 51.0 | 51.0 | 51.7 | 56.7 |

Note: Estimates do not include youth who dropped out of school and therefore may not reflect total national values.

<sup>1</sup>Sexually active is defined as having had sexual intercourse within the past 3 months.

<sup>2</sup>Race/ethnicity estimates from 1999 and later are not directly comparable to earlier years due to federal changes in race definitions. In surveys conducted in 1999 and later, respondents were allowed to select more than one race when selecting their racial category. Estimates presented only include respondents who selected one category when choosing their race.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Surveillance Summaries*. DData for 1991: YRBSS: Youth Online, Comprehensive Results.

Retrieved May 24, 2004 from URL: <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbss/>. Data for 1993: March 24, 1995. MMWR 1995; 44 (No. SS-1): Table 20. Data for 1995: September 27, 1996. MMWR 1996; 45 (No. SS-4):

Table 26; Data for 1997: August 14, 1998. MMWR 1998; 47(No. SS-3): Table 26. Data

for 1999: June 9, 2000. MMWR 2000; 49(No. SS-5): Table 30; Data for 2001: June 28,

2002. MMWR 2002; 51 (No. SS-4): Table 30. Data for 2003: May 21, 2004. MMWR

2004;53(No. SS-2): Table 44. Data for 2005: June 9, 2006. MMWR 2006; 55 (No. SS-

5): Table 46. Data for 2007: June 6, 2008. MMWR 2007;57(No. SS-4) Table 63.

